



The Casalini Libri Approval Plan: Origins, Contexts and Future Prospects

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1 Introduction

This contribution comes from a desire to improve knowledge of approval plans, a system of book supply for libraries that is particularly wide-spread throughout the United States. In Italy, this method is used successfully by a Florentine company that has been active in the diffusion of Italian publishing and culture worldwide since the late 1950s. In the period that saw the birth of the so-called "made in Italy" in Florence, at the hands of the first fashion designers, Mario Casalini, a young intellectual, began his contribution to promoting recognition of Italian cultural productivity, founding a business that still supplies services to many of the most important libraries across the world today. In this article we will consider the origins, characteristics and future prospects both of approval plans and of Casalini Libri's own relationship with this particular tool for book acquisitions and sales. A first for Italian professional writings on the subject, we will analyse the various stages of approval plans from the company's perspective.

2 Approval plans: definitions, origins, developments

With origins in the United States of the early 1960s, approval plans have evolved over time to become an established method of book acquisition, contributing significantly to the birth of important collections and close collaboration between libraries and suppliers. As a result, the majority of studies on this subject are from the American domain, with the greatest developments coming in the second half of the 1990s, when approval plans began to be introduced elsewhere, including, to a marginal degree, in some Italian libraries.¹ Today the characteristics and methodology of approval plans are known and recognised as a valid and effective system almost unanimously both by the library community and suppliers of the service, although this does not necessarily mean that the system is commonly adopted everywhere. The expression "approval plan" is not usually translated into Italian, a language lacking an exact equivalent in terminology, and requiring a circumvolution to convey the meaning. The term implies a model for acquisitions of published material based on collection development profiles and formal agreements undertaken with service providers. The libraries have a determinant role, both in the definition of the conditions and in checking acquisitions, including the right to return items that do not meet the established criteria; involving, in some cases, the input of main user reference groups. From an historical perspective, an initial form of book acquisition by libraries based on a structured plan to be shared with publishers was provided by the extraordinary Farmington Plan, a national USA programme, established and guided by the Library of Congress following the Second World War, which aimed to deal

¹ Given the vast range of literature on the subject, the bibliography quotes only the most important documents used in the writing of this article.

with the difficulties libraries faced in receiving documentary material from countries on whose territory the war had been fought. The plan required that at least one of the major research libraries in the US acquired, from selected suppliers, a copy of every book relevant to its own specialist subject or linguistic area published in the leading country of reference for that subject or language. In contrast to the approval plans that were introduced later, the Farmington Plan did not give participating libraries the right to return books to the supplier; rather, libraries were forced to share among themselves everything that was sent to them, in this way answering the national cause rather than the real needs of their own users. In the late 1940s, various acquisitions plans were developed in the US, allowing academic libraries to spend as efficiently as possible the notable budgets granted by the federal government for the purchase of foreign language books. These include the so-called "Blanket order plans", which still exist today. Similarly to the Farmington Plan, "Blanket order plans" always require an agreement between libraries and publishers, or book distributors, and usually foresee the supply of a copy of each title published by a certain publisher or in a particular subject area. Although in this case, also, returns are not permitted, at least the agreements are drawn out on the basis of users' interests. The introduction of approval plans can be traced back to the fortuitous meeting, in the early 1960s, of the entrepreneur Richard Abel, bookseller (of the company of the same name), and Don Smith, librarian at the Washington State University Library. It is Abel himself (Abel) who recalls how the notion of the new method was born: a result of a discussion with the librarian, who demonstrated his surprise at the speed with which his staff received the books that had been ordered. Abel explained to him that such speed was possible because his company always managed to acquire a copy of the catalogues of the libraries that it supplied, allowing

him to analyse and understand the characteristics of the different collections, the subjects of interest, level of coverage, perspectives from which subjects were considered and much more. In this way, when he examined the publishers' catalogues of new titles, he was able to anticipate which titles, and how many copies, would be requested by his customers. The experiment that followed became a success and the new system took the name of approval plan since, unlike blanket orders, it offered a great degree of flexibility: books supplied to the library could be either approved or rejected, if they did not fulfil the established criteria. Abel was so carried away by the success of this system that he invested more than he could afford and consequently went bankrupt in 1975. In the meantime, however, approval plans became more and more frequent in North American libraries, with the same methods adopted by other suppliers. One such supplier, Yankee Book Peddler, was bought by Baker & Taylor, while Abel's company became part of Blackwell; both larger firms taking over from the first two companies to have guaranteed this service are still active in the field today.

From the outset, the work flows of approval plans were formulated taking into account the possibilities offered by information technology, which was beginning to be introduced into American libraries during the early 1960s. This immediately facilitated the selection of titles by experts and assisted suppliers in the introduction of added services such as cataloguing for books sent, the management and conservation of large volumes of bibliographical data, and shelf-ready options allowing books to be shipped to libraries ready for placement on the shelves. New technology also provided possibilities for virtual selection via electronic bibliographic notifications, order placement and the exchange of messages based on the EDI standard. In time, approval plans have made use of tools such as: ever more sophisticated and detailed thesauruses; the Conspec-

tus system (which, since 1978, has permitted suppliers to evaluate and compare collections, facilitating the elaboration of co-ordinated plans for the functional development of approval plans); Kenneth Whittaker's systematic evaluation method (introduced in 1982 for the analysis and evaluation of documents to be selected); the development of telecommunications and Internet, which have contributed to making the diffusion of information and the interaction between the parties involved in approval plans much faster and more efficient. It has rightly been said that approval plans will continue to evolve as long as libraries continue to purchase books (Jacoby). We should now add "even in the case of electronic books". For e-books, publishers, aggregators and distributors usually propose subscriptions to packages or, alternatively, orders for single titles, standing orders, short-term loans or the so-called Patron Driven Acquisition or Selection models (based on selections made online directly by library users as they navigate e-book platforms). In order to maintain control of collections in digital format, however, libraries can acquire e-books under approval plans. The main suppliers of this service are equipping their platforms to enable them to manage requests for e-books, a format completely different from print in terms of characteristics and specifications and therefore requiring substantial changes to be made to existing work flows. It will be the suppliers' responsibility to ensure access to electronic material and activate control systems in order to avoid unwanted duplicate purchases of print and electronic formats by libraries. Library profiles in this context will therefore become more and more sophisticated and personalised, foreseeing not only the subjects and fields in which the electronic version is to be preferred to the print, but also describing the period of time libraries are prepared to wait to acquire material.

² Other new parameters to be introduced in the profiles may include: the overlap of e-book content compared with corresponding print titles (the e-book will be selected only if the content is identical to its print equivalent), Digital Rights Management (a profile may prefer e-books only if the permissions offer multiple access, download, limitless printing), the possibility for libraries to view the full text before purchasing in order to decide whether to accept or refuse suppliers' selections, and so on.

Main factors limiting the acquisition of e-books, in particular regarding the study of approval plans, are:

- the delay, if not the uncertainty of release, or the lack of e-books of a sufficiently scholarly level, especially in the Humanities and Art History (publishers currently concentrate much more on e-books for commercial literature, or tend to offer immediate e-book supply only to customers that contact them directly, without going through intermediaries.) (Walters, p.190-91);
- higher prices on average, particularly for the Humanities and Social Sciences;
- a large percentage of users that persists in its preference for print;
- unknown complications depending on technological problems (such as compatibility between platforms, formats and users' electronic devices).

The first examples of approval plans for e-books have been carried out in US libraries. Professional literature dates the first case of

²The embargo publishers dictate in order to guarantee themselves a slice of print sales currently varies from 3 to 18 months: on the whole it is shorter (and is being progressively reduced) for scientific disciplines, and longer for publications dealing with the Humanities and Social Sciences.

an e-book approval plan to 2008 (at Nova Southeastern University, Florida), with Coutts Information Services the supplier. Coutts has since created mixed solutions that foresee integration with PDA for interdisciplinary titles and more frequently updated works. Titles are made available to users based on specific parameters and limits set by the library and resources selected for inclusion according to approval plan profiles (one of the first examples can be found at the University of Colorado Boulder) (Buckley and Tritt; Forzetting, Wiersma, and Eager). The principal suppliers of approval plans today, besides the Americans we have already mentioned, include: Harrassowitz (Germany), Starkmann (UK), Puvill libros (Spain), Erasmus (Netherlands) and Libraire internationale Touzot Aux Amateurs de Livres (France). In Italy, the company of reference for this service is Casalini Libri which, like the other foreign companies, has created agreements specifically with North American and European university libraries ³. Indeed, Casalini is the publisher of the only Italian monograph to be written on approval plans to date: *Approval plans within the library, comparative experiences, a publication that collates brief testimonies from members of various libraries on their experiences of approval plans with Casalini.* ⁴



Figure 1: Mario Casalini

3 Casalini Libri: a small success story

Let's take a brief look at the roots of Casalini Libri. The company was founded in 1958 by Mario Casalini, a 32 year old Florentine hailing from a family of typographers from whom he had inherited his passion for books and publishing. Mario's grandfather, Cesare, had been the owner of the Carnesecchi typography; his predecessor at the firm, Giovanni Carnesecchi, had founded the publishing house G. C. Sansoni in 1873, together with his friend, Giulio Cesare Sansoni. The Casalini family operated, first under the guidance of Cesare, then with his son Pietro, under the name "Giovanni Carnesecchi e figli" until 1950.⁵

Born in 1926, Mario began to work in the Florentine publishing house La Nuova Italia from very young and quickly became director, then president. A highly educated and cultured man, he was inspired to create what was to become his own company following an official visit to the USA in the company of a group of directors of Italian publishing houses. On that occasion, various libraries had spoken about the difficulties they regularly encountered in receiving new books published in Italy: information on the existence of new titles arrived very slowly, if at all, and when it did arrive it was usually too late, considering the short print runs. In the USA the

³Approval plans are offered in Italy by other suppliers, including Cafoscarini (where the system is defined as "the continuing supply of publications selected according to library requirements") and Licosa (which supplies libraries with "publication announcements").

⁴Published in 2008 with introduction by Assunta Pisani and contributions from: Silvia Arena, Katharina Beberweil, Paola Bottecchia, Luca Guerra, Eugenio Pelizzari, Klaus Kempf, Rossana Morriello, Elisabetta Viti (Pisani and Arena). Some of the texts had been published previously. The bibliography cited is almost exclusively limited to the USA.

⁵Historical information is taken from: Aquilani; Casalini, "Italian-language books"; Strauch; Pisani; Lottman, the website <http://www.casalini.it>, interviews with Barbara and Michele Casalini.

phenomenon of mass immigration and the development of academic institutions after the Second World War had increased the interest for Italian language and culture, bringing a rise in the number of people capable of reading Italian books and of using them for their research. A variety of factors made the system by which Italian publications arrived in the US often complicated and problematic. Mario Casalini understood that there was a vacuum waiting to be filled: the Italian national catalogue, *Bibliografia Nazionale Italiana* (BNI), was very accurate but too slow in the creation of records to be of use as a reference to libraries; the catalogues of individual publishers were partial, incomplete and insufficient. Returning to Florence, Mario established the family business with his wife Gerda von Grebmer with the precise aim of supplying Italian publications to foreign libraries, an activity that required an enormous commitment in terms of research if he were to obtain information and material that otherwise would have remained unknown or difficult to acquire. During the 1960s, when approval plans were becoming a well-established practice in the USA, the system was adopted by Mario Casalini, who began to work with the Library of Congress in Washington in 1967. At the time, he had already built up a wide and solid network of contacts that permitted him to acquire a large number of scholarly books that were not otherwise easily available. In this way, he succeeded in ensuring that his customers received good service, extending the business to include professional cataloguers and maintaining contacts with the BNI (headquartered at the National Library in Florence, BNCF), through the US shared cataloguing programme that the Library of Congress ⁶ had agreed with 20 countries in order to manage as best possible the cataloguing of vast numbers of books in foreign languages. In particular, the agreement signed in 1968 between LC and the BNCF stipulated that around a hundred titles

⁶The Library of Congress in Washington will henceforth be referred to as LC.

from among the books selected each week by Casalini for supply to the LC would be transferred to the BNI offices for cataloguing by the organisation's personnel. Each week, therefore, Casalini collected the books that had been catalogued by the BNI to forward them to LC and, in their place, delivered another hundred to be catalogued. Thanks to this agreement, LC received a large percentage of books already catalogued by the BNI, which, in turn, was able to update a section of its catalogue in a timely fashion.



Figure 2: Working at Casalini Libri

The Italian collaboration in the shared cataloguing programme ceased in 1984, when the BNI became part of the SBN (National Library Service), which ruled out the inclusion in its catalogue of



Figure 3: Mario Casalini with Marion Schild

books that had not been acquired by Italian libraries. For many years, Casalini continued to inform our bibliographic agency regarding important Italian publications that should be acquired (Maltese). The services offered today by Casalini include the in-house production of bibliographic descriptions for new Italian publications immediately following their release, since it is not possible to rely on the promptness of the BNI. Barbara and Michele Casalini, Mario's children, who have taken over the company reins, have amplified the firm's activities, putting the company forward no longer only as a supplier of Italian publications, but also of published titles from France, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Speaking about the fam-

ily business, Michele Casalini remembers (Casalini, “Insieme per l’innovazione tecnologica: Fiesole Retreat”) how the IT system was developed in the 1970s, bringing automation to all sectors and making it possible to supply bibliographic services in internationally recognised electronic formats not just to university and national libraries, but also to consortia and specialised databases (such as OCLC and RLIN⁷). In the 1990s, the company was one of the first in Europe to activate the entire production cycle (from the promotion of new titles to the invoicing of books and journals) in the ISO EDIFACT standard, and therefore finalise various models of data exchange that were compatible with numerous library systems. In 1996 the site www.casalini.it was created, providing a constantly updated database of bibliographic descriptions for titles with abstracts, ToC (Tables of Contents) and other information that assists librarians and scholars in selection and acquisition processes and approval plan activities. The Casalini Libri Digital Division was established in 2000 to provide services for electronic publishing at the forefront of the sector; in 2003, EIO – Editoria Italiana Online was introduced as the first Italian multimedia portal for institutional use, dedicated to the fields of the Humanities and the Social Sciences; the Casalini Full-Text platform was born in 2010 at the address www.torrossa.it, offering to libraries a continually growing collection of academic content from over 130 Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese publishers. The new operative hub in Caldine was added to the historic headquarters of the Villa Torrossa (Fiesole) in 1998 and later extended in 2008 to accommodate the growing staff, which currently comprises around 90 people. Despite the many changes over the years, 25% of the company’s turnover is still connected to approval plans [Photos 4 and 5].

⁷Online Computer Library Center and Research Libraries Information Network.

4 Casalini Libri and approval plans

One of the characteristics of Casalini is its ability to satisfy the multitude of different library requests through personalised services. This implies a notable organisational commitment and investment of resources, as well as making it impossible to set out work flows that are linear, repetitive and simple: there are so many variants based on library requirements that a number of procedures is required, each with its own complexities and details. All of the company's interdependent departments work in close collaboration, intertwining to create the nucleus of a single structure in which respect for timescales in each separate sector is fundamental to ensure that all areas reach their targets.

4.1 Formalisation of profiles by the library

Prior to the activation of a new approval plan, Casalini holds discussions with the library to exchange information, make agreements and define in writing the typology, areas and modality of supply for the services required. The data provided by the library is grouped as follows:

- general information, essentially relative to the countries of publication, the available annual budget, characteristics, modality and timescales for the supply of bibliographic records, "not selected" title lists, statistics, returns, payment and other administrative procedures;
- formal criteria (non-subject parameters) regarding: typology of publication required, publication year, edition, level of coverage (according to the 5 levels set out in the Conspectus system: 0 for exclusion, 1 basic information, 2 selective, 3 research-level,

4 comprehensive), publishers to be included or excluded, collections and monographic series, minimum number of pages, price limits for each individual volume and more;

- thematic criteria for content (subject parameters) based on 2 and 3 digit DDC (Decimal Dewey Classification), or other classifications and category lists. It is advisable for libraries not to limit themselves too much to rigid classification schemes, as these may automatically exclude the selection of interdisciplinary works;
- stop-lists detailing the type of publications that should not be selected.

Over time, profiles are naturally subject to tweaks and changes. The constant verification of profiles and procedures is fundamental to guarantee the quality of supply and reciprocal satisfaction, but most importantly the satisfaction of library users.

4.2 New Title Information Service

If approval plans are to be successful, it is necessary to have access to a vast number of publications from which to select, within a very short time of their release; publications not only from the major publishers but also, and especially, from specialised "niche" publishing houses that are less well-known but offer high quality titles, at times only available outside normal trade channels. To make this possible, Casalini uses its New Title Information Service, a department dedicated to the development and maintenance of relations with suppliers, distributors and publishing houses, as well as with printers, art gallery curators and individuals. This department has a central role within the company, as it evaluates all of the

publications that it traces or receives to decide whether they should be passed to approval plan selectors for consideration.

4.3 Bibliographic production

The Bibliography office has a complex organisation. Each year it produces almost 50,000 records of bibliographic announcements, around half of which deal with Italian publications, 7,500 French titles, and 16,000 Spanish and Portuguese books (O'Loughlin). These new title announcements are visible on the company website or sent on a weekly or monthly basis to librarians requesting the service. Once approval selections have been made with book in hand, titles are catalogued to different levels depending on the requirements of the libraries to which they will be supplied. If a library requests cataloguing according to the Anglo-American rules, the book will follow a particular course. Casalini specialists access the Cataloger's desktop, an on-line platform of the LC with instructions on all aspects of cataloguing, from the description (following the new RDA Resource Description and Access) to the semantic (according to LCC, including the application of an LC Call number, and the LCSH).⁸ For customers with local classification systems, "custom cataloguing" is offered and the Anglo-American cataloguing adapted. This personalisation is provided for the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich (using as reference the authority files of the Bavarian consortium) and for the Library of the Libera Università di Bolzano (using the RVK classification, Regensburger Verbundklassifikation), among others. It is possible to offer a high level of cataloguing to the Anglo-American world thanks to the shared cataloguing project enthusiastically supported by a group of American research libraries (ARL, American Research Libraries, including the libraries of Har-

⁸Library of Congress Classification; Library of Congress Subject Headings.

vard, Yale, Stanford and Princeton), through which participating libraries and OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) share the benefits and costs with the Library of Congress.⁹

4.4 The true approval plan

Selection and supply may begin in virtual form: in a first stage, Casalini can send lists of selected titles only, allowing libraries to implement approval plans gradually, adjusting profiles with greater ease. Approval selectors are very much aware of their position of responsibility, which requires them to keep in consideration the existing collection of the library and the need for consistency, and at the same time follow the guidelines given by libraries, respecting at all times the specifications and limiting as much as possible an inevitable margin of subjectivity. Over time, a reciprocal understanding and knowledge grows between the two parties, although attention is always needed due to the changeable dynamics of profiles and collections. Other aspects to be considered are: "Budget control", or the detailed time plan of selections made for individual libraries based on the quoted and agreed levels of spending; analysis of the reasons for any returns from the library in order to avoid repeating errors in successive selections.

4.5 Shelf-ready

Contracts between Casalini and libraries may include so-called "added-value services" which, in addition to the supply of bibliographic records at different levels of cataloguing, can refer to the

⁹"For Casalini's participation in the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) and in the Shelf-ready Project: "Casalini's participation in the for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC) and the Shelf-ready Project", (Genetasio and Terravecchia), and bibliography.

physical processing of books with the application of barcodes and security strips, placement of spine labels, library stamps and, in some cases, binding. In this way, volumes arrive at the library ready to for immediate placement on the shelf and availability for loan. Libraries receiving shelf-ready books benefit from a service guaranteeing a precise correspondence between the books that arrive and the data already present in their library systems. Classification derives from the semantic cataloguing produced by the bibliography department that is meticulously assigned according to library instructions, which, in addition to general specifications, also dictate the modality and frequency of shipping.

4.6 Future prospects

Casalini Libri has made provisions for the technology necessary to manage e-books and PDA for approval plans. To date, however, approval plans for e-books have not been activated as there have not yet been definite requests from libraries. An essential element for the management of electronic or hybrid approval plans is a knowledge of the release times for electronic editions, a factor which currently presents a number of unknown factors relative to the effective availability of electronic formats. The problem is particularly notable in the field of scientific-level texts in languages other than English, particularly in the Humanities, Art History and Social Sciences, the principal fields of bibliographic production in Italy and other romance-language countries and, as such, precisely the publications that Casalini supplies.

5 Italian libraries and approval plans

Around 300 libraries have an approval plan with Casalini, mainly university and research libraries which include some of the most important and prestigious cultural institutions in the world, as well as public lending libraries. Overall, 63% of approval plan sales are made to American libraries. This is most likely due to historical and cultural factors because of which the USA acquires larger quantities than any other country of publications in many different foreign languages, an activity made much more manageable by the introduction of approval plans. In Italy, many library directors have had the opportunity to get to know this acquisition system through the "Master in library management and organisation" course organised by the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, in collaboration with the IAL Cisl nazionale which, since 1994, has hosted lessons on collection development taught by Assunta Pisani, tutor and librarian at Harvard and Stanford libraries. Despite the interest that these lessons have generated, they have rarely laid a foundation for the diffusion of approval plans in Italy, where the practice remains marginal. Casalini Libri's first approval plan for an Italian library was implemented at the end of 1997 with the Seminario Giuridico dell'Università di Catania; the institution wanted to provide all scholars and legal practitioners with a growing collection of up-to-date reference documents, both from Italy and abroad. In 1999, an approval plan was created for the library of the Università Cattolica of Milan for Italian publications in the Social Sciences, Pedagogy, Economics, Political Sciences, Psychology, Italian Studies and Linguistics.¹⁰ The Università Cattolica of Milan still has an approval agreement with Casalini. Another important Italian

¹⁰In 1998 the university had begun an approval plan with Blackwell for publications from the USA and UK (Bottecchia).

library to have an approval plan (since 2003) with Casalini is the Bicocca, also in Milan (Arena, p.11-14). For reasons that we will discuss, approval plans in Italy are adopted more frequently by private institutions or libraries belonging to foreign institutions, rather than by public entities. These include the libraries of the European University Institute (EUI) in Fiesole and the Berenson Library at Villa I Tatti in Florence. If not immune from the general economic downturn, Casalini continues to operate at the highest level, as can be seen by the company's collaboration in international projects and with demanding foreign customers. On 31st March 2013 Casalini made the switch to RDA cataloguing, unlike the SBN, which at present will not participate in this wide-spread innovation. Returning to approval plans, these have never caught on in Italian libraries, apart from rare exceptions. Casalini believes that the tendency to "maximum savings", ever present in tender exercises run by public institutions, means that price becomes the determining factor more and more, penalizing companies that offer additional services. This can be partially justified if we consider the continuous reduction in funds for book acquisitions and the fact that less generous discounts are applied to approval plans in comparison with the conditions that can be obtained through firm order purchasing. The AIE (Associazione Editori Italiani / Association of Italian Publishers) has recorded the progressive reduction in public funding made available by institutions (State, local authorities and universities) which, in the period between 2005 and 2010, has halved the buying power of libraries in the publishing market (Frigimelica). Let us not forget that in 2012 the Central National Libraries in Rome and Florence had a total of Euro 250,000 at their disposal for the development of their collections, and the 46 Italian state libraries, together with the Istituto Centrale per i Beni Sonori e Audiovisivi received, collectively, Euro 1,900,000, compared with over 6 million dollars spent

on book acquisitions by the Library of Congress alone.¹¹ We are faced with such incomparable figures that these may explain the reason why our libraries do not consider approval plans for the development of their collections. In terms of university libraries, we must consider "the network" of the Italian system; since 2005 numerous universities have joined together in one of the most significant examples of inter-university co-operation in terms of the number of institutions involved, impact on management and collective economic value. This consists of an inter-university tender for the acquisition of monographs, run by the Polytechnic University in Milan and under which the 13 libraries involved have invested 3 million Euro per year for a three-year period (Bardi, Bezzi, and Scolari). In addition to the acquisition of monographs, it would be advisable for this agreement to include the co-ordinated development of acquisitions with the criteria of stability and rationality that approval plans can guarantee. A sort of co-operative approval between university libraries could work if, once competitive instincts were overcome, it were adequately supported by a related organisation to assist the circulation of books through interlibrary loan and by a "catalogue sharing" programme similar to the Program for Cooperative Cataloguing. This would guarantee a sustainable collaboration, thanks to a division of cataloguing costs, even with the controlled involvement of private enterprise. In Italy, there are various examples of regionally co-ordinated collection development, but none of these make use of approval plans. A questionnaire I

¹¹The figures for the state libraries were quoted by Paolo Arrigoni of the Ministry for Culture in his email of 23rd August 2013. The sum spent by the LC was communicated by library staff members in an email dated 9th April 2013. As far as regional public libraries in Italy are concerned, an article by Panullo (2013) states that in 2012 the collective spending on books was around 30 million Euro, for an average of Euro 7,850 each.

distributed by email to many libraries ¹² reveals the recurring motivation as the desire to maintain tight control over acquisitions. Such fear of losing a post of autonomous decision making reveals how little is really known about approval plans, which are challenged not only by economic problems but also by a number of various cultural factors.

6 Conclusions

It is clear that much suspicion still surrounds the role of private enterprise in the public domain, and specifically in the areas of cultural heritage in this country; libraries fear that market factors will prevail over the unconditional promotion of books. The fear is probably not completely unfounded, since we are aware of the weaknesses within the public institutions that should safeguard the public interest above the presence of private profit-making firms. It is a complex question on which there may be many differing opinions. Other historical and cultural factors that limit the diffusion of approval plans in Italy include:

- little familiarity with collection development policy and in general with the culture of long-term planning, rationalisation and collaboration among libraries;
- the regulations governing the acquisition of goods and services by public bodies, as these foresee a rotation of suppliers at the expense of long running, tried and trusted relationships that are the basis of approval plans;
- the lack of demand for approval plans means that suppliers do not invest and, consequently, do not develop the service;

¹²Questionnaire sent by mail in April 2013.

- the desire of many university tutors to continue to select personally the titles that the library should purchase.

In conclusion, we can affirm that:

- if carried out correctly by both of the parties involved, approval plans are a very valid tool for collection development according to criteria of structure, rationality and conformity to users' needs;
- the adoption of an approval plans implies the existence of conditions such as: an awareness of its value and effectiveness; certainty of the available budget, a centralisation of libraries and powers of decision (where there is no central library it is difficult to manage unified work flows); an ability for planning, programming and control; competence and a notable effort on the part of the librarians, again with the involvement of user representatives.

In Italy, it is rare for all of these conditions to be fulfilled, and this study aims to contribute to greater awareness not only of the origins of the system, but in particular the characteristics, organisation, procedures, value and even limits of a tool that has ensured the success of the largest company in the sector in Italy, where it is to be hoped that in time conditions will develop allowing approval plans to be considered for the rationalisation of acquisitions, be this in collaborative schemes involving more than one library.

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the approval plan method of book acquisition and discusses one of the few Italian companies active in the cultural sector that has offered and provided this service for many years, enjoying huge success across the world, if only marginally in Italy.

In preparing this study, the author has made valuable use not only of the existing

literature on the subject, but of the opportunity to spend a period of time within , where she was able to follow the different phases of the approval plan work flow, benefitting from first-hand explanations and clarification on the procedures, direct contact and conversations both with approval selectors and with the company directors. In order to provide a full overview of the topic, interviews were also held with various directors and heads of acquisitions and library systems of a number of Italian libraries.

Conclusion is that approval plans are still today a highly valid acquisition method. Determining motives for which libraries turn to this method are not so much economic issues, although these must not be ignored, but are mainly social-cultural aspects including a greater international outlook and a widening of horizons within the academic institutions served by the libraries, as well as more meticulous planning by library authorities.

KEYWORDS: Acquisitions; Approval plan; Casalini Libri.

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